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State shuts 12 oil company wells that pumped waste into aquifers

By **David R. Baker** Updated 8:54 pm, Tuesday, March 3, 2015**IMAGE 1 OF 5**

Pumpjacks operate at Kern River Oil Field in Bakersfield, where aquifers are being polluted.

State officials have ordered oil companies to shut 12 more wells that injected oil-field wastewater into drinkable aquifers beneath California's drought-stricken Central Valley, regulators reported Tuesday.

The wells, used to dispose of water left over from oil production, are clustered in Kern County, the heart of the state's petroleum industry. All have pumped water laced with oil and trace chemicals into aquifers that could be used for drinking or irrigation in the valley's fields and orchards.

They are the result of three decades of bureaucratic confusion among state and federal regulators that allowed oil companies to drill hundreds of disposal wells into aquifers that were supposed to be protected by law. The problem was the subject of **a Chronicle investigation** in February.

Each of the 12 wells recently ordered closed was found to be injecting wastewater within a lateral mile and 500 vertical feet of a drinking-water well, prompting the shutdown order from the state's Division of Oil, Gas and Geothermal Resources.

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